



Lao Food ? what's that ?

by **Xaixana Champanakone**
at Viangchan's night food market
on Khounboulom Road



Introduction

Kin Khao – 'eat rice' is the daily celebration of life, and the way of cooking what you 'eat with rice' – kin kap khao – reflects the Lao attitude to life : Simplicity

Three rocks, some firewood and a pot will do the trick, and a mortar and pestle would come in handy. Ah, and a steam pot and bamboo basket!

You buy fresh in the market what has been newly gathered and caught along the rivers, in the fields and in the jungle - vegetables, leaves, herbs and fish. Whatever livestock runs around the house yard makes for a feast.

Bamboo skewers grill things on the fire while banana leave wrappings roast food in the hot ashes or steam it in the bamboo basket; the pot cooks soups and stews, and fries the odd meat. Mortar and pestle pound roots and spices, chilli pastes and the life sustaining papaya salad; and the steamer and basket makes a home for it all with sticky rice.

With few tools and some herbs the Lao know to magically produce culinary delight, finely balanced in flavour, varied in preparation, all of it ultra healthy - light and fresh.

Cooking and life - simple, immediate, receiving the abundance of nature with humility. Every meal is Thanksgiving, an auspicious and merry occasion blessed by the presence of family, friends, neighbours and colleagues ... or you as the guest, anytime.

Where does this leave you?

Venture on foot or by kayak into the deep countryside for a 'homestay', eat in the local street stalls or bypass exercise and culture shock and go adventuring at a restaurant dedicated to serving Lao food in style.

Where daily meals are 'ingenuity in simplicity' – sticky rice, a chilli dip, something grilled and something boiled, all of which is accompanied by mountains of fresh herbs – festive occasions justify the extra effort to produce some of the Lao signature dishes to be featured in this magazine's next issues together with everyday fare for healthy sustenance :

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3. Chilli Dips - the 'major-domo' of the food spread



Jeow, there is jeow, and there is jeow. Sauces and dips are called jeow as long as these contain chillies.

The classic jeow is either fairly dry or a paste, which plays a principal role in the daily finger eaten sticky rice diet. Its preparation calls for the chillies, shallots and garlic to be thoroughly roasted. This process takes away their acidity and adds that smoky touch. They are then pounded with mortar & pestle to produce the dip.

The choice of jeow is enormous and solely depends on what other ingredients you have thought of. The particular herb, vegetable, meat, fish or insect that adds its distinctive flavour, gives its name to a jeow like jeow dok-het (mushroom dip). Some famous preserved bong varieties are identified by province of origin like Louang Prabang, Xieng Khouang, Samneua.

A combination of vegetables are served alongside: fresh cucumber and long beans; raw or pickled bamboo shoots; scalded cauliflower, broccoli, cabbage, ferns etc. Eat together with sticky rice and any grilled meat and you have a feast; light, healthy and fulfilling - simple!



Tomato Jeow

Eggplant Jeow



Sawtooth leaves

Mushroom Jeow





Jeow also means any sauce which contains chilli and is served aside in a little bowl for individual seasoning. The most famous is the universal *jeow mak-phet pa* (chilli fish sauce) or *nam prik pla* in Thai. Jazz this sauce up with a bit of garlic, a touch of coriander and a good squeeze of lime and you add spice to any lame-duck dish.



Address

Saifone Jeo Hone Restaurant is located on Quay Fa-ngum Road opposite Don Chan Palace Hotel. It's a bit noisy because of the live band but the *jeow hawn* is real good!

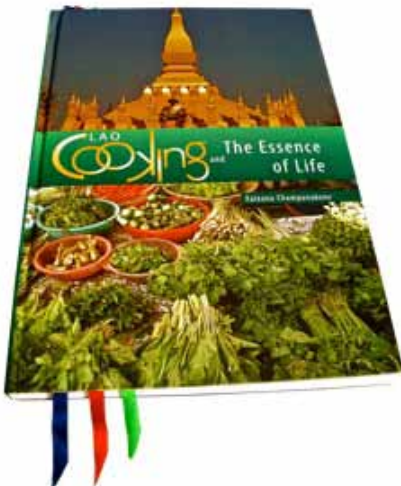
Jeow Hawn, *jeow* is served hot (*hawn*) as a soup in an earthenware hotpot on a charcoal stove which is placed in the center of the dining table. The food is cooked and eaten fondue-style. You may like to add young coconut water and its young jelly-like meat. Different kinds of meat and fish are served on separate plates. Participants use chopsticks and long handled little sieve-bowls to do their cooking.



Prepare a choice of eggs, glass noodles and vegetables such as spring onions, cabbage, morning glory, watercress and mushrooms which are added at intervals to the pot as they are eaten together with the soup. Refill the hotpot with stock when needed.

See you for the next issue

Chaixana C.



Lao Cooking and The Essence of Life by Chaixana Champanakone
- Monument Books in Vientiane, Luang Prabang and Pakse
- Green Discovery Travel Specialists' offices in Luang Namtha, Luang Prabang, Vang Vieng, Vientiane, Thakhaek and Pakse
- Preview and online purchase at tropicaldesignfz.net/book